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"They sat in the sunshine, with a background of roses."—p. 13.

ESTHER WEST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PEGGY OGLIVIE'S INHERITANCE."

CHAPTER III.—THE GAME BEGINS.

"THERE they are at last," said Kate Vaughan to her sister Millicent, as Esther and Constance again came in sight.

They had not begun their game, as Constance

anticipated, but had sat there waiting for the truants, and speculating on the cause of their absence. The many-coloured mallets and balls lay on the grass at their feet. The gentlemen—viz.,

their father and their father's friend—had strolled to the top of the garden, and were engaged in discussing some topic of the day; and the young ladies were not a little impatient of the delay which had occurred.

They sat in the sunshine, with a background of roses, which clustered all over the front of the house. There were roses single and in pairs—roses by threes and fours and half dozens on a single spray, laying their heads together like girlish gossips. And the sisters did not lose a whit by that background of bloom. They were themselves as blooming as the flowers; indeed, they had been named in the neighbourhood the Redhurst Roses. The three sisters were perfect marvels of youthful beauty; the beauty which consists in freshness, and bloom, and all the gloss and glow of health. Their light summer costume was as fresh and fair as themselves; and as they sat there, ready for their favourite game, in their pretty little hats and coquettish boots, they looked like pretty birds who had plumed themselves from pure love of daintiness.

Yet they were dainty with a difference. The sisters, in outward appearance so like—so like in their colouring and in the softness and fairness of youth—were in reality very unlike in character. The unlikeness was, as yet, only slightly indicated in the outward appearance; still it was there already apparent, and in process of development. The hats, with their white feathers tipped with blue, were all alike; but they were worn with a difference: Kate's with a slightly imperious air; Milly's with a sweet humility; and Connie's with a careless, roguish grace. Kate would wear a brooch where her sisters wore only a ribbon. Kate would also choose her colours a shade brighter, and lay on more of them, than the others; so that now, bright, hard blue predominated in her attire over Milly's greys, just lighted up with the same hue. Milly's dress also flowed round her in softer folds; and Connie's had the misfortune to soil and spoil the soonest.

Kate's hair had a golden ripple in it. Her lips were the reddest, and her eyes the brightest of the trio. She was also slightly inclined to *embonpoint*, dimples forming in the corner of her mouth, and softening the outline of a firm, proud chin. Milly was altogether paler and fairer, with more delicate features, and a more slender frame. Her greatest beauty lay in a pair of lovely blue eyes, which it was no exaggeration to call heavenly. They suggested saintliness; and there was, in truth, a deep strain of tender, religious feeling in the nature of Millicent Vaughan, which corresponded to the outward expression.

As for Constance, she was less ethereal than Milly, and less luxuriant than Kate. She threatened to be rather large and bony, both in face and figure, and she had no scruple about tanning her bright skin in the sun. It was a graver face than either

of her sisters, though it seldom looked serious. There was humour lurking in the eye and in the corners of the somewhat large mouth, a something of sweetness which Kate's dimples and Milly's serene smiles failed to yield.

But the individual characteristics of the girls were as yet overlaid with the softness and the bloom of youth, and of youthful happiness. They were, indeed, very happy. It seemed as if they had grown in that garden enclosed and defended from every blast of ill. Nothing had ever come to stunt or to blight these richest growths of nature. Yet they had been out in the world. They had lost their mother early, and had all been sent to school, while their father lived a bachelor life in London. But as soon as it was possible he had had his girls home, and installed the eldest as housekeeper at Redhurst. At home they had greater freedom than most girls of their age, and a wider culture. Their father, a literary man of high standing and of small independent fortune, made friends and companions of his daughters. They read with and for him. Each had her own opinions about books and things. Each had also her own ideal of life.

The young housekeeper's ideal was a fine house and good society, with all their adjuncts of luxurious living—a brilliant and bountiful life, which would help to develop her into a brilliant and bountiful woman, if only it could be attained without any hardening process—for Kate was capable of hardening. It was a mystery where she got some of her worldly notions, for the home atmosphere was thoroughly unworldly—Milly's ideal, for instance, being the life of a hardworking curate's sympathising helpmate.

Between two elms, which stood at the foot of the garden, and made the landscape look like a picture in a frame, the girls as they sat in front of the house, could see a wide stretch of thoroughly English country beyond the bright, breezy common, bounded by its sandy wooded hills. Esther and Constance came on in quite a leisurely fashion. "I can't think what those girls get to talk about. Only see how they creep along, arm in arm. I do wish they would make haste."

There was an almost vexed impatience in Kate's tone as she said this. Then she sighed, and, through the singing of the birds, she was answered by a great sigh that swept through the hearts of the elm-trees. The girl was sighing to begin her game, and there was something in her impatience which signified that of the young heart weary of uneventful living, and longing to go forth and meet with mortal fate. Kate sighed, and rose and went toward her father and his friend to call them to their posts on the lawn.

Mr. Vaughan was a literary man; not of the fast and loose kind generally to be found figuring in modern novels. He was a man of good education,

of high honour, and of pure life; all, in fact, that a man should be who presumes to teach the truth—be it the truth of science or of life—to his fellow-men. He was open minded and open hearted; and who shall say how many a man in his profession fails for want of the latter, who has no lack of the former; whose clearest insight is at fault for want of a little of that charity which never faileth? His fine and subtle mind, unlike most of the finest minds of his contemporaries, was unsectarian in its tendency. His difficulty would have been not to believe, could it have been possible for him to be convinced of the intellectual necessity for non-belief. His difficulty, believing as he did, being as he was a Christian man, in all manliness, was not that he could not believe more, but that he could not believe less. His friend, Herbert Palmer there, called him an optimist; and would fain have convinced him that things were not even so good as they seemed, and very far indeed from being better, as he believed.

"Yours is a delightful philosophy, Vaughan," his friend would say; "but with rampant folly everywhere triumphant—to say nothing of wickedness—I can't see how a man like you can hold on to it. Your cheerfulness is simply unreasonable. It sometimes strikes me as positively insane."

"It is quite true that I do not see wisdom and goodness everywhere triumphant," Mr. Vaughan would reply; "but I see in everything the intention that they should. You will own the inherent weakness of folly, the inherent misery of sin. All I have to do is to see that I range myself on the side of that intention, and strive to carry it out to the best of my ability."

At which Herbert Palmer would shake his head, proclaim the forts of folly invincible; but own that, if they were ever taken, those who came after, would find his friend's body by the wall.

Mr. Palmer was a journalist, and spent most days of his life in a dingy London office, working conscientiously in his vocation. He went into society as part of his work; his recreation was generally solitude. Unlike Mr. Vaughan, he was apt to take the gloomiest possible view of things. Whenever it became evident, from the tone of his writing, that he had become more than usually savage in his mood, Mr. Vaughan arrived at his office on Saturday afternoon, and carried him off for the next two days to Redhurst; and the public benefited greatly, as well as Mr. Palmer, the result being a series of more cheerful and more digestible articles for a week to come.

This friend of their father's was a great favourite with the girls. They read up all that he wrote, and were ready to come down upon him whenever he broached any particularly dismal theory. He brought them news of the great world, even to the last new style of hairdressing at his last fashionable party. "The Watch-dog" was the name he went by among

themselves; and personally, he had a great resemblance to one of those trustworthy animals, being dark, and thick locked, and strong browed, with a pair of mournful, kindly eyes, that had often a wistful look in them, in spite of their angry fires.

The girls had taught Mr. Palmer the game of croquet, and very proud they were of his proficiency, and of the general docility which he displayed. He was always ready, for instance, to take for partner the young lady assigned to him, and to do her bidding by coming up to her assistance when sent by adverse fate to the furthest confines of the ground. But to-day, when he had followed Kate to where Milly was seated, he proposed himself on her side.

"But we are the worst players of the lot," said Milly; "both on one side, we shall be sure to lose the game."

"I don't like to be too sanguine," he answered; "but I mean to win if possible."

There was a wistful look in the dark eyes as he said this, which Milly did not notice.

Only Kate laughed, and said, "You are growing quite independent, Mr. Palmer."

"I hope Constance will give up Esther to us then," said Milly. "We can't have you, papa. You, and Kate, and Constance are more than a match for us, for Connie plays well when she pleases."

Thus it was arranged just as Esther and Constance came up together.

"What have you two been about?" said Kate.

"Didn't you understand my signals?" Constance replied.

"Not in the least," said Kate; "we only saw that you turned back with Esther, and that you had something in your hand."

"It was a letter for mamma," explained Esther. "I got it at the post-office, and was coming on to ask leave of absence to take it to her when I met Constance. We hoped you would begin without us."

At last the game began in earnest, for the afternoon was already somewhat advanced. The shadows of the elms were lengthening eastward on the grass. For the next hour or two there was much running, and laughing, and prompting, and very little conversation. Only it had gradually passed from one to another of the little circle, till all were aware of the fact, that Esther's Australian cousin was coming home by the next mail.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF THE GAME.

It was a well-contested game. There were many skilful moves on both sides; many a ball neared its goal only to be sent to the furthest corner of the field by an expert enemy; or, even at the winning-post, found it necessary to go back in order to bring up lagging friends.

"It is easy for one to go on alone," said Mr.

Palmer, who had been unexpectedly successful; "bringing up others is the hindrance."

And back he went to bring up Esther and Milly, who had fallen into the hands of their enemies.

"It's very ungrateful of you to complain," said Kate. "Think of the number of times I have had to bring you up."

"Ah, that's only human nature!" said the cynic, who seemed, however, to be enjoying his work.

"Besides, it would be no use winning alone," said Milly; "that is, you could not win alone, but only put yourself out of the game."

"What I would be tempted to do in most cases," he replied.

"Ah, Palmer, that's it," said Mr. Vaughan; "those who would win the race of culture alone, leaving half the world behind them, will find that they have not won after all—have only put themselves out of the game; or else they will have to go back and bring up their fellows; they will have to go generations back, if need be. It's one of the conditions of the game of life, that we can't win alone."

But this time Mr. Palmer was on the winning side: he, and Esther, and Milly got the game. When it was over, the party scattered into groups. Kate stepped through the open window of the drawing-room to dispense the afternoon tea, which was laid there; and Mr. Vaughan went up to Milly, and drew her away from the rest with a look of unusual tenderness—insomuch that she looked at him questioningly and said, "Is anything the matter, papa?"

Nothing was the matter. Garden chairs were found for the whole party, who seated themselves forthwith, while Kate and Constance handed cups of tea out of the window.

Then they began to talk of the Australian, and to club together the scattered information they had obtained from Esther concerning him, while they were playing.

"He is rich," cried Kate, from the tea-table.

Mr. Palmer laughed.

"And young," said Milly, innocently. A remark which, somehow or other, quenched the light on the dark face beside her.

"And handsome," said Constance, in playful mockery.

"And you are all ready to fall in love with him," said Mr. Palmer, "for all these qualities in combination."

Thus they chatted on, as if life were a summer holiday; and the shadows of the elms lengthened on the grass, and the western sky began to glow.

Then Kate declared that Mr. Palmer had had six cups of tea, and should have no more on any pretext whatever; and Esther hastened to say good-bye to her friends, that she might be home in time for dinner, for which the others dispersed to dress.

Esther took her way homewards in the evening

glow, with its strange, transfiguring light shining on her face, and bringing out its latent pensiveness; and she was aglow from her innocent enjoyment, aglow with the gladness of the present, and the bright anticipation of the future. The great event of the day, the announcement of her cousin's return, was still in her mind, had been in her mind all the afternoon, and was perhaps the cause of those dreamy eyes and that pensive mouth.

To deep and thoughtful natures all great joy is serious. The greatest joy has something of awe in it. And this was a great joy. Not that Esther looked upon her cousin in the light of a lover. Mrs. West was too delicate a woman to have presented him to the girl in that light; but he was her hero. She remembered the bright, handsome, impulsive boy, and pictured him perfect in his manhood. His letters were so frank, so vivid, so full of life, so unlike all that she saw or knew of the lives of men, so much more manly, that he seemed to her the very man of men! How noble he was in his simplicity, beside the few literary young men she had encountered at Mr. Vaughan's;—the sulky young poet, who had taken her down to dinner, and had never once spoken to her, being entirely occupied with his great grievance, an adverse review in the *Athenæum*; or the enthusiastic one, who had effectually prevented her from getting any dinner at all by speaking the whole time, and leaning the while with his spectacled nose right over her plate; or the young man of the period, sublimely indifferent to everything in the universe except himself. What a real life it seemed to her, riding over those wide western runs, driving home the herds of wild cattle, counting by thousands, and tens of thousands, more life-like, and better worth living than the lives of any of the men she knew. Thus had her young imagination been impressed with pictures of a patriarchal life, and in the centre of the pictures there figured a kind of shepherd king in the shape of Harry West.

Just then, as if to reproach her with her sweeping depreciation of his sex, there rode up a young man of elegant figure and thoughtful face, who reined in by her side, and saluted her with a respect which had in it a touch of chivalrous devotion. She returned his salutation frankly, and he walked his horse by her side for the few paces which would bring her to the entrance of "The Cedars." She walked with her eyes cast down, not from him, but from the light that fronted them, so that he was free for those moments to peruse her face, an opportunity of which he availed himself with ardour. At the gate she looked up, and bade him good-bye. His admiring glance was restrained in a moment. She had not seen it; nevertheless, she made a reservation in favour of her neighbour, Benjamin Carrington, when she passed sentence on the young men of her acquaintance.

Esther found her mother—for so, for the present, we may call her—just as she had left her, seated in

her favourite window, looking out among the cedars, her letter still in her lap.

"Mamma, darling, you look as if you had never moved out of the spot," said Esther, gaily.

"And I do not know that I have," she answered, still letting her eyes rest on the level boughs, and the lake of molten gold which seemed to swim behind them. She used to say they stretched out their arms to her, as if to bless her with their peace. Alas! it was long since the gentle heart had known peace. All the difficulties in which she had involved herself were present to her mind. She had poisoned for herself the fountain of her happiness, as, in one way or other, so many of us do; and the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, the pure and peaceful Spirit of God, could not come unto her, because she had no will to put the evil thing away.

"I am so glad Harry is coming," she said at last, looking up at Esther.

"I shall be quite jealous of Harry," said Esther, jestingly.

"It is not that you are not enough for me," she answered, hastily and nervously. "My own!—my own!"—she almost sobbed as the girl knelt at her feet. "If you and Harry should love each other, my heart would be at peace."

She had never said anything like that before; and she said it now because she was overwrought by the emotion of the last lonely hours.

There was silence in the room after the words had been said; the silence of a reverie which neither seemed to care to break.

Strangely enough, that very afternoon, Mrs. West had thought of Mrs. Wiggett, of whose neighbourhood she was quite unaware. Not, however, by her present name had she remembered that little woman, who had a hidden history of her own, which might have remained hidden too, but for that fatality which comes upon some people who live themselves in very crystal palaces, in the shape of an uncontrollable mania for throwing stones.

The weight always pressing on Mrs. West's spirit had been heavier than usual that afternoon. In vain she had tried to banish it; to forget its very existence; to say to herself, All is, and shall be well. It was there; it would not be banished: it boded, or seemed to bode, quickly-coming ill. It was as if the very air bore to the sensitive soul the slighted tremor of approaching fate. A dread of some unknown impending evil, which might pass her by if she could only cease to dread. As if Fate were a piercing eye, which she might elude if only she had the strength to resist the fascination of looking that way! To such a height had the miserable feeling risen, that Esther's unexpected return with the letter was almost more than she could bear; and her heart still beat with sickening faintness as Esther knelt on at her feet in silence.

It was Esther who broke the silence at last. "I

feel as if I could never love any one as I love you, mamma," she said, kissing the fair thin hand.

"Do you think you would love me as well if I were not your mother? if—if I were some one else?" said Mrs. West, bending over the girl with an almost agonising look.

"What a strange question, mamma!"

"Esther——"

The name sounded faint and far away, as if it had been uttered by the last breath of a departing spirit. What might have followed remained unspoken; for the fragile speaker lay back in her chair, and quietly fainted away.

There was no painful fuss and flutter over the fainting form. Esther rang the bell for her mother's maid, and stood holding fast the frail hand, while some simple restoratives were used. The first sign of returning consciousness was the pressure of the thin fingers. She seemed to keep hold on life by that firm young hand which held hers in its anxious clasp.

Mrs. West, after lying down for a little, appeared at dinner as usual; and, as usual, the mother and child spent their evening together in light work or reading; Esther instinctively keeping aloof from any topic that might touch her mother's heart.

But there was a vague trouble in her own; and when her mother had retired, as she did at an early hour, she carried the lamp into a little room beyond, and sat looking out upon the cedars, with the cool night air fanning her forehead, and the silver sickle of the new moon hanging over the dark, solemn trees.

That same silver sickle hung over the garden at Redhurst, and witnessed a new birth there—the birth of love. All the stars came out and gazed and trembled over it, and the flowers sent up their sweetest odours, as if breathing the secret to the stars. The thing was so new, so sweet, so strange, so sudden, nobody could tell exactly how it came to pass, not even Millicent herself, who was the subject and the object of it, except that she devoutly believed in its heavenly origin, and took it as sent from God.

As far as can be told, this is how it came about: Herbert Palmer, during those summer days, had drawn very near to Milly, and had drawn the unconscious girl very near to him. On the evening after the game he sat next her at dinner, and contrived to surround her with a kind of isolation, as if there had been none there but he and she alone. Neither could have told the precise moment when heart answered heart under the mysterious spell which it needs no words to weave. Only when the ladies left the room, Milly, the serene and mild, had grown shy, conscious, and blushing under the gaze of half-triumphant love. Then, when her sisters had settled themselves to read, she took a book in her hand, and wrapping a light shawl about her pretty

figure, stole out into the garden. But she was not long alone. She was followed to the leafy nook she had chosen, and caught like a timid bird. And Herbert spoke of himself and of his aspirations, and how often they were chilled and quenched in the world, needing just such inspirations as she could give. And the girl who, as a child, had known, and loved, and looked up to him, thrilled through and through with wonder and with tenderness, and the familiar home-garden changed in the starlight into that Eden which still awaits on innocent and happy love. With every pure sense drinking in the enchantment of the hour, Milly and her lover lingered beneath the stars, and she listened to the fond reiteration of a passion which had suddenly transformed her life, till her fair head sank upon her lover's shoulder, and she trembled into happy tears.

"Papa has gone into the library alone," said Constance, returning from a search for a book she wanted. "Have you noticed, Kate, in what an extraordinary manner the Watch-dog has been prowling about this time? I declare, there he is at the top of the garden, and Milly with him! I can see by her white dress. They look exactly like a pair of lovers."

"I wish, Constance," said Kate, "that you would not speak such nonsense."

But the younger sister's quick sympathy was roused, and in spite of the repulse, she went up to Kate and whispered, "Oh, Kate, I am sure it is so—dear, dear, Milly! Then the two laid aside their books and waited with a tender trouble in their hearts."

But Milly was too shy to enter the now lighted room where her sisters sat. "Your father knows it already, my love." This assurance had comforted her concerning him. While they lingered, the bell rang for prayers, and Milly and Herbert stole, side by side, into the dimly-lighted library, without word or comment, seeing they met for a sacred purpose. Side by side they took their places in the family circle, and their first act was kneeling together and mingling their voices in the universal prayer, an act in which the heart of the slightly world-worn man became as the heart of a little

child. And somehow it became known to all the household that Milly and Mr. Palmer were engaged.

And when Milly went to the room, it was Constance who followed her, and held her in her arms, and heard the shy confession of her happiness, and filled up the great need the heart has of being rejoiced with in its joy—a need far keener and deeper in most hearts than that of being wept with in sorrow, but one to which only the most tender and generous natures respond.

"Child," said Milly, looking in her sister's face, "I seem only to-night to have found out your love as well as his. And where is Katie?"

Kate was with her father in the library, alone with him, and giving him more pain than he could well account for.

"I thought Mr. Palmer had been too poor to marry?" she had remarked.

And her father had answered, "Well, he is not very rich, Katie; but he is one of the ablest men I know, and high principled, too, as well as able. I think Milly ought to be proud of his preference."

"And where are they to live?" asked Kate, in the same hard tone.

"In a cottage as near us as possible; somewhere that will allow Herbert to go in and out daily."

"I think Milly has thrown herself away," said Kate.

"What do you mean by such a speech as that, Katie? You do not mean that loving Herbert—as she must have done, or why should she have accepted him?—she should have held herself back for a higher bidder. I cannot imagine a happier lot than has fallen to Milly. Oh, my child, do not give me cause to fear that you are less worthy of such another."

And at this little speech, tender as was its tone, Kate had felt herself aggrieved, and had retired to her room with considerable heart-burning. She was vexed with Milly, who had been quick to perceive her want of sympathy, vexed with her father, and vexed with herself. Her heart was troubled and stirred to its depth for the first time, and she felt something very like vexation that Milly should be what she considered out of the game—settled down as a poor man's wife.

(To be continued.)

"THE WAY OF CAIN."



HOW many are there, who, loving God's Word for the love which it reveals as flowing from God to man, yet fail to apprehend much of its true meaning, for the want of not merely careful but prayerful study! "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," is, indeed, no purposeless prayer; and it is those who

are best read in the Word of God who are most ready to acknowledge that no matter how often they read the most familiar of its histories, some new light seems to be thrown upon each fresh reading. Day by day, fresh evidence is added to already existing and innumerable proofs of the might of the inspired Word, which, as the Apostle Paul truly describes it, "is quick and powerful, and

sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It is, indeed, all this (and who can say how much more?) in its awakening, convincing, re-vivifying power: while, as regards human observation, it is like a priceless gem, which reflects a thousand different colours, according to the different lights in which it can be regarded.

It is instructive at times to take as the subject of consideration some one person or event, or even virtue or vice; and, tracing it, as far as may be, through the range of Scripture history, we shall often find new lights thrown upon it by writers who lived many hundreds of years from the first relation of the subject-matter. Thus we find the history of Cain related in the early part of the very first book of Holy Writ, and light thrown upon it by St. Paul, St. Jude, and by the very latest Scriptural writer of all, the Apostle and Evangelist St. John. Nor is the teaching of the Lord of life himself withheld with regard to it, as the character of Cain is sadly implied in his words, "the blood of righteous Abel."

The whole of the actual history of Cain—as much, at least, as is revealed to us—is, like that of many of the earlier characters of the Old Testament, comprised within a few verses. The only recorded fact of Cain and his brother Abel, between their birth and their joint sacrifice, is the occupation which they severally chose. Yet, even here, may not something be deduced as to the character of the men? Every apparently little fact in Scripture has its meaning, and in the order in which the occupations of the brothers are given, Abel is the first-mentioned. It may be that their parents persuaded them to adopt different callings, in order that they might be free from opposing interests—that they might have opportunities for mutual help; and that the example of Abel, though the younger brother, induced Cain to exchange idleness for the employment which we find he had adopted. It appears that when the two brothers, who were both probably under thirty years of age at the time, brought offerings to present to the Lord, "the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering: but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect." The cause for this acceptance of the one offering, and rejection of the other, may not be immediately apparent. It has been said that Cain's offering should have been like Abel's, of the flock, instead of the fruits of the earth, and that an exchange with his brother would have enabled Cain to make an acceptable offering. But, even had it been so, it would probably have been no more acceptable to a just and holy God. In opposition to this view, it has been said that this is the first recorded

sacrifice in the Word of God, and that probably no Divine commands had been given as to what should be offered. But there have certainly been many commands of the Almighty of which, as not concerning ourselves, we are not informed, and the choice of Cain of the material of his sacrifice may have been in itself an act of disobedience. He may even have had the example of former sacrifices, offered by his father or younger brother, as a guide for his choice. But, independently of these considerations, the plain words of Holy Scripture sufficiently indicate the cause of the Divine displeasure. "It came to pass," says the sacred narrative, "that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." Thus, although Cain is the first (in order) mentioned in this instance, as though he were the more ready, he may yet have hastily taken of his possessions that which came first, or was most easily procured, or least valuable, and offered to his God "that which cost him nothing," which seems, to say the least, probable, when it is remembered that Abel offered, not merely the firstlings, that is, the best part of his flock, but "of the fat" of the firstlings; that is to say, the best part of the best animals. Thus it is certain that, as regards material alone, Abel's sacrifice was truly acceptable; but the more modern sacred writers throw on the subject the clearest light. In the words of St. Paul (Heb. xi. 4), "*By faith* Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." And later, of St. John (1 John iii. 12), who declares that Cain "was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore," he continues, "slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Hence the inference is plain that Cain did not walk with God, and the reverential spirit of "righteous Abel," and the faith by which (in the possible absence of direct command) he offered up to God, it may be also as to material "a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" were altogether absent from his offering, and formed no part of his worship.

Other points in the sacred narrative are full of interest to the Biblical student who cares to carry further a minute examination of the text. We are not, for instance, informed of the way in which the Almighty's acceptance and rejection of the respective sacrifices was made manifest. Some artists would have us suppose that, while the smoke of Abel's sacrifice ascended in an erect column towards heaven, that of Cain was turned backwards towards the ground. But such passages as Lev. ix. 24; 1 Kings xviii. 38; 1 Chron. xxi. 26; and 2 Chron. vii. 1, in which the descent of fire from heaven was vouchsafed as a mark of Divine

favour at the first offering of Aaron, at the contest of Elijah at Carmel with the prophets of Baal, at the sacrifice of David at the threshing-floor of Ornan* after the pestilence, and to Solomon at the dedication of the temple, rather tends to encourage the idea that to Abel this method of expressing the approbation of the Almighty, which was afterwards repeated, was now for the first time adopted.

That Cain's countenance fell, is little matter for wonder, but his wrath is that by which we should especially take warning. "Let the righteous smite me," says David (Ps. cxli. 5); "it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." But on this occasion God condescended, not merely to reprove, but to reason with man; and when God will so show his love for man, how shall man do otherwise than reverentially listen, in the spirit of Samuel's "speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth?" That Cain's inexcusable anger continued, however, is sufficiently shown by the fearful crime which so soon followed his faithless sacrifice. His anger was caused, not only by the rejection of his own sacrifice, but by the favour accorded to his brother. Independently of the duty of man to receive humbly any communication of God, Cain's anger, whether as regards his God or his brother, was contrary to all reason. His brother's acceptance was no injury to him, and gentle as was the reproof of his God, it was accompanied with the encouraging words—"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" Still the godless man (who would not think that the voice of God speaking to man must warn and convert?) cherished the anger of his blind and headstrong folly; pretending good-will to his brother when "war was in his heart," he talked with him when they were together in the field, and then rose up against him and slew him. Could anything be wanting to fill up the measure of his wickedness? It was at hand. Opportunity of confession of sin to his God was offered to him by that God. "Where is Abel, thy brother?" is God's next communication to him. Oh! had he even then repented, the grace of forgiveness might have been his; but he gave the lying answer, "I know not," with the rebellious addition, "am I my brother's keeper?" From this time he was a vagabond and an outcast; the ground was so cursed to him, that when he tilled it, it was no more to yield him its strength. Dreading for himself the fate of which he had not scrupled to cause his brother to feel the most bitter pangs, he was secured from it by an at once protecting and avenging mark, of the nature of which no trace remains. May it not have been simply the indelible horror of his mind reflected in his

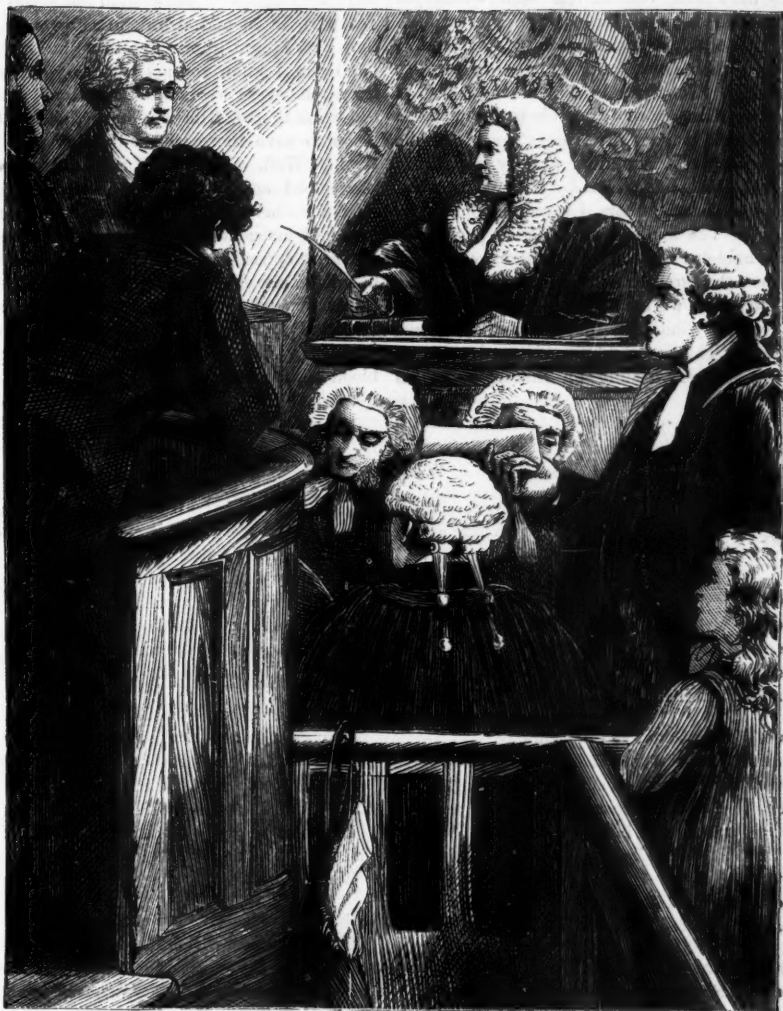
countenance? Who can tell the terrors of a conscience-stricken mind, even though the crimes on the conscience be far less in degree than that of Cain? No more vivid description of them can be found than that contained in Wisdom xvii., which, though apocryphal, is true to nature, and though referring to the Egyptian plague of darkness, is applicable to any guilty conscience:—

"Supposed to lie hid in their secret sins, they were scattered under a dark veil of forgetfulness, being horribly astonished, and troubled with [strange] apparitions. For neither might the corner that held them keep them from fear: but noises falling down sounded about them, and sad visions appeared unto them with heavy countenances. No power of the fire might give them light: neither could the bright flames of the stars endure to lighten that horrible night. Only there appeared unto them a fire kindled of itself, very dreadful: for being much terrified, they thought the things which they saw to be worse than the sight they saw not. . . . But they sleeping the same sleep that night, which was indeed intolerable, and which came upon them out of the bottoms of inevitable hell, fainted, their heart failing them: for a sudden fear, and not looked for, came upon them. So then whosoever there fell down was straitly kept, shut up in a prison without iron bars. . . . Over them was spread an heavy night, an image of that darkness which should afterward receive them: but yet were they unto themselves more grievous than the darkness."

This graphic description must fall far short of the reality in the case of such "sinners against their own souls," as any who are guilty of the crimes of Cain—cannot exceed the terrors of many whose sins are far less in extent, but who have nevertheless grievously fallen away from God. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." If we read the history of Cain merely as any other historical narrative, we shall derive little good from it. We may be, as the Apostle Jude says, "going in the way of Cain," without committing every crime which could be laid to Cain's charge. It is singular that the apostle couples "the way of Cain" with "running greedily after the error of Balaam for reward." We have seen how Cain offered a worthless sacrifice to the Lord. We know not how many steps of his subsequently grievous error may be traceable to this one, so closely akin in its nature to the covetousness of Balaam, which led him to an end that could scarcely have been that which he would have desired, who said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Let us avail ourselves of every warning which such a history affords. Let us not think that did

* More commonly known as Araunah the Jebusite. See 2 Sam. xxiv. 18.



(Drawn by C. J. STANILAND.)

"The case then commenced."—p. 27.

God speak to ourselves as he spoke to men in days of old, we should be more ready than they to take even that solemn warning. God spoke in the early days of the world himself; later by prophets and miracles; last of all by his Son and his apostles. The utterances of prophets and apostles have long ceased, but their words yet live, and Christ none the less speaks, though ascended into the heavens to the right hand of glory, than when he walked the earth in poverty and humility. But those by whom he speaks are no less (how often far more!) liable to temptations to sin than other men. The great apostle of the Gentiles said, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." The higher our Christian privileges, the more holy our avocation, the nearer our access to Christ—the greater our responsibilities, the deeper our fall if we keep not our hold, by a holy life and a lively faith, on that to which we have been called. The Saviour himself has given us no ordinarily solemn warning on this point in his

words—"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 22, 23.) And again—"Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." Such are the warnings of Him who nevertheless shed his blood to save those who will allow him to save them. Well, indeed, may St. Paul declare that that blood speaketh better things than that of Abel, for whereas Abel's blood cried for vengeance (not that his gentle and loving spirit did so), that of Christ appeals only for mercy. With such aid, how hopefully may we draw near to God, and with this to depend on, with how sure ground for hope. We were, indeed, once far off; but how near are we already brought to our God by the precious blood of his dear Son.

VISIONS.



VISIONS of beauty! dreams of my childhood!
Come back again in your witching array;
Sweet as the warblings of birds in the wild
wood,

Fresh as the dew-heads in mornings of May.
Oh! let my spirit dreamily wander
Once again back to those far-away hours;
Love as I loved then, purer and fonder,
Heaven all sunshine and earth strewed with flowers.

Visions of glory! bright as the noon-day,
Come back again in your richness and truth;
Gorgeous and warm, as the sun of a June-day,
Wild as the mountain-stream—Visions of youth!
Oh! let my spirit bathe in your splendour;
Life throbbing strongly through heart and through
vein,
Love—a deep passion, holy and tender;
Pleasure—the life-wine my soul sought to drain.

Visions of greatness, knowledge, and power!
Come back again as ye were in my prime;
Mellow in promise of fruit from the flower,
Fame from the lay—Manhood's ripe Autumn time.
Oh! let my spirit cling in its longing
Still to those visions that flattered and fled;
Let me repeople my heart with the thronging
Of phantoms that cheated, of hopes that are dead!

Visions! all visions! How sad to remember
Beauty and glory and greatness when gone—
Spring, Summer, Autumn, all past—and December
With snow-flake and cloud coming gloomily on!
Echo of strings long untouched by the finger,—
Odour of life when its flowers decay,
Memory—how fondly the soul loves to linger
Through thy dim shadow-land wandering away.

Visions! all visions!—the dreams of the sleeper,
Man walks in shadows from cradle to tomb;
In shadows that ever grow darker and deeper
As his life-sun goes down to its setting in gloom.
The Past all illusion—the Present flits from us;
It dies as we grasp it and turns into Past.
The Future, all darkness, gives only one promise—
When our journey is over, the grave-rest at last.

Oh! let my spirit slumber no longer,
Lapped in those visions delusive and sad.
Awake!—let thy ken become clearer and stronger
To pierce those life-shadows, my soul, and be
glad.
All is not darkness—from regions Elysian
Through the grave, as it opens, a light thou canst
view.
Evanish ye shadows! dissolve every vision!
For all things in heaven are real and true.

J. F. WALLER.

JOHN HENTHORN'S TRIAL.



NE by one the charges were read over. He, John Henthorn, stood charged with having stolen a handsome gold watch, four other articles of jewellery, and some bank-notes, from Ebenezer Grant, commercial traveller; and he was charged on the second count with having the above-mentioned articles in his possession, knowing them to have been stolen. He was only a lad—just eighteen: he had no friends in the great city, which seemed to him so hard-hearted, at that moment, to be continuing its business with the same eager roar as ever, while he stood on his trial. He had no friends? Yes, he had a dear little friend—his little sister, Lucy. She was standing by, listening to the person who read over these charges in a hard, dry, matter-of-fact style, and then asked her brother—yes, though she could hardly believe it, it was her own brother John, who stood there in the dock, between two policemen—asked her brother whether he was guilty or not guilty.

She listened eagerly for John's reply. She saw his mouth open and make an ineffectual effort to form the word; at length with a great gasp it came—"Not guilty."

Little Lucy breathed more freely. Her little finger was laid upon her lips; her thin face was paler than ever, but her eyes were bright and anxious—no, not so much anxious as watchful and eager. She knew now—for she had heard her brother speak—that John was innocent; and though she knew—for she was nearly famished—how sorely John might have been tempted by necessity, yet John's word was passed, and John was innocent.

John was innocent; but John must be proved innocent. She knew that the gentlemen ranged in rows before the judge were all clever lawyers, who could prove that her John had stolen nothing; so she slipped down from the crowd amongst which she was standing, and, being so small, she passed unobserved to the corner of the lawyers' seats. She watched all their faces for a long time. Some of them were busily engaged turning over great masses of paper and parchment; others were sitting moodily with their hands pressed upon their foreheads, briefless barristers, who were meditating on the inequalities of the world, and how it was that "that densely stupid Fumblefrump has his hands full of cases," and they "who could beat his head off at billiards, or any other gentlemanly employment," were left briefless. Amongst these unhappy and involuntarily idle barristers, was one who had for fourteen years frequented the courts, and never met with that treasure—a brief.

He had no connection—no one to give him a start. His little fortune was ebbing slowly away. He had managed to pick up a few pounds in a variety of ways. He had sometimes communicated the first intelligence of an appalling accident, which he had been fortunate enough to witness, to some of the daily papers, and had received a few shillings for his trouble. But bit by bit his little capital—the careful, hard-earned savings of a loving father, the vicar of a little country living—dwindled away. He was thinking, with his head between his hands—thinking bitterly of his unprofitable life; he contrasted his own position of compulsory idleness and unavoidable gentility, with the industrious and grateful toil of the day-labourer. He pictured the rough-handed man returning from his work—tired, but not exhausted—the merry faces and the hearty greeting—the crowing children, and the radiant-faced wife. He then thought of himself, Edmund Carew, returning to his lonely chambers with pale face and dejected spirits; and Edmund Carew was about to curse the day of his birth, when a light finger was laid upon his elbow, and a face paler and sadder than his own looked up at him.

"Will you make the judge let my brother off?"

"Who is your brother, little woman?"

Little Lucy pointed to the dock.

Now, by some means or other, Edmund Carew's ears had heard the charges against the lad in the dock, and his memory had retained the outline of the case, though his mind had been occupied with bemoaning his own unhappy lot. He looked up at the lad, and saw a fine manly-looking young fellow confronting the whole court. In an instant a lesson was taught to the lawyer. Here was a youth, friendless in a great city, and yet boldly keeping a good heart in the presence of a most crushing and cruel trial. The sight lent fresh courage to the briefless barrister's heart.

The judge spoke. "Have you any counsel?"

"No, my lord," said John.

"Then, Mr. Fumblefrump, I think——"

"Pardon me, my lord," said Edmund, rising; "the prisoner was not aware, but I am instructed by his friends to undertake his defence."

His friends! John looked round in amazement. His friends! yes, the barrister had said his friends; but he could not understand it; for he could not see his little Lucy standing by the barrister's side.

The case then commenced. The counsel for the prosecution called his witnesses. The claimant of the articles, the waiter, the boots, and the barmaid at the inn, were all called to prove that John Henthorn must have been the thief. It appeared that John had been in the habit of frequenting the

"Blue Boar," in the hope of meeting with some employment, as the "Blue Boar" was a rendezvous for persons seeking tutors, travellers, agents, &c. The claimant of the goods was described as a commercial traveller; he had met the prisoner at the inn, and had had some conversation with him. He deposed to having lost his watch and other articles; he gave the number of the notes, and identified the watch and jewellery.

The boots, barmaid, and waiter were called to prove that the first witness had a watch when he arrived at the "Blue Boar." The waiter noticed it "perticler," as the clock in the commercial-room had stopped, and he had asked the gentleman to be so good as to give him the "hexack" time.

The barmaid proved that the commercial gentleman and the prisoner had talked a long time together at the bar; that the commercial gentleman had taken a few glasses of spirits, and had gone straight to bed, after John Henthorn had left the inn.

"Was the commercial gentleman intoxicated?"

"No, sir, not that; but he was careless-like in his manner when he bade the prisoner good night."

"When did the gentleman first mention his loss?"

"When he come down the next morning."

Police constable 113 Z was called to prove that the watch and other articles were found by him at the prisoner's lodgings, No. 137, Little Zebedee Street.

While these witnesses were being examined, an old gentleman had made his way into court. He now sat beside Edmund Carew: he wore a large pair of gold spectacles, from beneath which there beamed a pair of benevolent-looking eyes. He never looked about him, but kept his eyes fixed on the witnesses, as one by one they filed into the box.

Edmund Carew cross-examined the witnesses for the prosecution. His interest was roused; he was working for another; his own troubles were forgotten; others beside himself were friendless; it was a new joy to him to find some one whom he, helpless and useless, could befriend. He threw his whole mind into the case, and he cross-examined with keenness and vigour, and the parchment-faced attorneys nodded now and then at one another.

Mr. Ebenezer Grant lost his nonchalant manner and his tone of supercilious indifference, as the young barrister pressed home a few pointed questions. The barmaid ceased to be coquettish, and the waiter to be positive.

Finally, the barrister declared his intention of calling witnesses for the defence, and began by calling upon Mr. Blenkinsopp.

When Mr. Blenkinsopp entered the box, poor John Henthorn gave way altogether: he leaned forward, buried his face in his hands, and sobbed; and Mr. Blenkinsopp's voice trembled a little as he described himself as the senior partner in the firm of Blenkinsopp, Fussell, and Fudge, attor-

neys. He identified the watch, and notes, and other articles as his own. He deposed to having given them into the charge of the prisoner on the afternoon of the day on which the robbery was alleged to have been committed.

Would he tell the court the circumstances under which he had entrusted these articles to the prisoner?

Yes. He was summoned on the day he spoke of to attend a large and important meeting in the city. He left his office about noon, and on his way to the place of meeting he turned into the "Blue Boar" to get some lunch. He met the prisoner in the common room; got into conversation with him. While there he discovered that he had brought his watch, and notes of value, and some few trinkets with him; he had done so unintentionally, as he made it an invariable rule to leave all articles of value behind him when he attended public meetings: he gave them to the prisoner to take charge of.

"Did you tell the prisoner your name?"

"No."

"How were you to receive your property?"

"I agreed to call at the prisoner's lodgings in Zebedee Street."

"Did you call there?"

"Yes; and heard from the landlady that Mr. Henthorn had been arrested."

The counsel for the prosecution here asked a question. "Excuse me, Mr. Blenkinsopp, was it not rather a foolish thing to entrust such valuable property to a total stranger?"

"Not when you have studied men and their faces as long as I have. An honest man carries his character in his face."

The watchmaker was called to prove that he had sold the watch to Mr. Blenkinsopp about a month previously.

A clerk from Mr. Blenkinsopp's office was called to witness the numbers of the notes, which had been drawn from the bank early on the day before the robbery, and the numbers entered in his private pocket-book, according to custom.

Mr. Ebenezer Grant would gladly have closed the trial at this stage, but his patience was doomed to a further trial.

An inspector in the detective force was called, and he gave evidence as to the character of Mr. Ebenezer Grant, and in the course of it, a slight history of the commercial traveller's career came to light. He was a traveller, but the firm for which he travelled was not to be found in the Directory. Before he left the court he was arrested on more than one charge, and there was some talk of indicting him for perjury.

John Henthorn was acquitted, of course, and he and little Lucy were invited, together with Edmund Carew, to dine with old Mr. Blenkinsopp.

And then John Henthorn told his story. After receiving the watch and notes, he remained at the "Blue Boar," in the hope of hearing of some employment. While waiting, he had met Mr. Ebenezer Grant, who had been most affable, and most prodigal of his promises to get John employment. John admitted that he was very much taken with his companion, and that he had confided too much to him. He told him of the curious old gentleman who had entrusted his property to him; he showed him the watch and the notes; and Mr. Ebenezer Grant had taken a great deal of interest in the story, and had examined the watch and the notes, and pronounced on the quality of both. He had endeavoured to persuade John to give them up to him to keep; he had declared he knew the old gentleman quite well; and when he found that this tack was unsuccessful, he made hints which John did not understand then, but the meaning of which he now understood fully—viz., that they should go off with the money and divide the spoil.

John then told more of his own history. How his mother had died when he was young, and his father only lately, leaving his sister and himself totally unprovided for; how they had sold the little furniture in the cottage in the little country town where they lived, and had come up to town to seek their fortune, and how all their little fund was spent.

When the little dinner party broke up, I think everybody went home happier. Edmund Carew felt happier. It was not because he had made a good start in his profession, for he was hardly aware of that: he had been interested in the case, and had forgotten himself; it was not because Mr. Blenkinsopp had compelled him to take one of the bank-notes as a fee, declaring that the case was his own, and Edmund Carew his barrister; it was not because he had made the acquaintance of the senior partner of an influential firm of city lawyers—I think the happy faces of the brother and sister whom he had befriended made him feel happy; but this I know, that when he reached his lonely chambers, they did not seem so lonely as usual, a fragrant memory seemed to be present, a frail, fairy-like little form seemed to move about them; and when he fell asleep, he dreamed that a light little finger was laid upon his elbow, and two bright little eager eyes were gazing into his.

Mr. Blenkinsopp went home happier. He was a lone old man. He had a benevolent heart; but he was odd. People thought him a stern old man; but they did not know the painful story of his life; they did not know of the sweet home he had had when young, and how in a week the old home had been broken up, and he had been sent to the care of a stern old aunt, full of precise kindness, and sharp, prudent, and saving ways; they did not know of the up-hill fight he had endured, nor

yet how he had forsaken many a pleasure and many a gain, that he might go home and watch by the side of his sick old aunt, who had been the making of him; still less did they know the story of the old Bible, which his aunt had read so regularly to him when he was a lad, and which he read so regularly to his aunt when she was an invalid; they did not know of that night when the sternness of the aunt had forsaken her, and the story of a loving Saviour's death had laid hold upon her heart, and he learned to see there was more of reality in that word than he had ever thought of, and went to his room to read and pray, but not to rest. They did not know how the bright and happy truth had at length dawned upon him, and how he had changed in all but the cold, stiff manner that he could not change; for though the heart was warm and tender that beat within, there was needed something without to draw forth the kindlier manner.

John and his sister went home happier that night; for John's misfortune had proved his success, and he was to go to Mr. Blenkinsopp's to-morrow, and commence his occupation as clerk there at a fair salary.

"John," said little Lucy, as she bade her brother good-night, "I have thought of a nice text for to-day."

"So have I, Lucy."

"What is yours, John?"

"No, tell me yours first, Lucy."

"When my father and mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up." And now yours, John."

"I have been young, and now am old, yet never saw I the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." That's the text came into my mind when Mr. Blenkinsopp told me I could go to him as clerk. I remembered our dear father's life, Lucy, and how he wore himself out in trying to help others, and how he always said that he could trust the providence of God, because he knew the grace of God."

Then they parted for the night, and little Lucy knelt beside her tiny bed in that dingy little room, and thanked God for his care, and prayed a blessing on the good old man, and the noble young man who had befriended them that day.

* * * * *

There was a wedding some years after this, when Edmund Carew, Esq., Q.C., was married to Lucy Henthorn, only sister of John Henthorn, Esq., of the firm of Blenkinsopp and Henthorn; and a very happy wedding it was, and people remarked that old Mr. Blenkinsopp looked the merriest of the party till the bride and bridegroom went away, and then it was noticed that he coughed a good deal, and muttered to himself, and wiped his spectacle glasses very often.

W. B. C.

LITTLE CONTENT AND THE GRUMBLETONIANS.

PART II.



O the mayor went to the door, and called Little Content, and she went in, and down to the kitchen, where all the maids looked at her very much askance, and went into the passage to talk her over.

"Master's bewitched," said the cook: "the idea of bringing that beggar's brat here for us to wait upon!"

"Yes! and where's she to sleep?" said the housemaid.

"I don't know, I'm sure! under the table, I s'pose, amongst the blackbeetles—there's no wheres else!"

Little Content heard all this, for they took no pains to subdue their voices; but she was thankful for any shelter, and rejoiced to think that she had made so good a beginning with the highest dignitary of the place, and his wife.

When the servants returned to the kitchen, Little Content was singing, as was her wont, not thinking of the discomfort of her position, but of the progress she had made.

"Singing! eh!" said the housemaid.

"Umph!" ejaculated the cook.

Then the boy in buttons entered with an old piece of carpet.

The cook snatched it from him, and spread it under the table.

"There," she said to Little Content, "sleep there till morning, if the blackbeetles'll let you."

"Thank you," answered little Content; "can I do anything for you, before you go?"

"Eh!" said the cook, staring. "No."

Then she and the housemaid left the room, and they heard the low voice of the child, softly singing to herself—

Praise to the Master of Earth and Heaven.

When the morning came, Little Content got up from her hard couch, and went to the pump and washed her bruised face, and threw the cold water over her head and face. Then she felt refreshed, and went in and laid and lighted the fire, and swept the hearth, and sat down to wait, softly singing to herself, while the bright flashes of flame lighted her pale, beautiful cheeks, and gave her yellow hair a more golden glow; then danced in her angelic eyes; and, best of all, warmed her delicate, stone-bruised feet.

Presently down came the cook, in a bustle.

"Oh! dear me! what shall I do?" she exclaimed on the stairs, "I've overslept myself, and I shall never get breakfast in time, and there will be such a row!"

Just then she burst into the kitchen, and when she saw the fire lighted and the hearth clean swept, she was very glad indeed, so glad that she gave Little Content a great hug, and then set about making her coffee at once, and preparing the rest of the breakfast for the mayor and his wife.

The breakfast turned out wonderfully well that morning; the coffee was just right, the eggs were boiled to a nicety, and the toast was done to a turn. The cook was rung up to be praised, and the mayor's wife forgot to grumble at anything. She sent for Little Content, and asked her a good many questions, amongst others, who she was, and where she came from.

But Little Content asked her to be content not to know, and she asked no more questions, but told Content to prepare for a walk with her.

The child's preparations did not occupy much time. She washed her face and hands afresh, and straightened her hair, and then she was ready.

She and Mrs. Mayor walked down the principal street, and as soon as the usually sour face of the latter was seen approaching, all the little children scrambled off, and Mrs. Butcher, who was standing at the shop door, looking down the street, gave a start, and rushed back into the shop.

Now, it was Mr. Butcher that the mayor had been quarrelling with on the previous evening, and he had likewise heard the song of the child, and pondered it over till he came to something like a notion of his own wickedness and discontent. By the time he reached home, he was greatly softened, and astonished his wife by speaking mildly to her, and eating his supper in silence, without grumbling even the shadow of a shade of a grumble during the whole meal. Such a course so astonished the wife, that she was equally silent, and at last her husband told her how he was quarrelling with the mayor, and how the mayor was grumbling at him, when a beautiful child passed; and he told her what she was singing, and how she was bruised, and how the mayor followed her, to take her to prison, he supposed, for being a beggar, and wandering about the streets.

And the wife was interested in the story, and she and her husband talked long together, and agreed what an unhappy time they had spent, all for want of a contented mind; and they lay down to sleep that night with lighter hearts than they had carried for years, and a determination to look at the bright side of things in future, with the help of the Great Master, whose aid they would ask, and whose praises they would sing.

Now, the mayoress used to go about the town to collect the various discontents of the people, and

bring them home to her husband to petition the king about.

Mrs. Butcher was much surprised to see Mrs. Mayor coming down the street with the child, whom she knew by her husband's description, and Mrs. Mayor was equally astonished to hear no complaints from Mrs. Butcher, who was a very clever grumbler indeed.

"Have you nothing to complain of?" asked Mrs. Mayor.

"No, nothing," said Mrs. Butcher. "We have been wicked and ungrateful, my husband and I, and all our household; we have been full of complaints, and we have withheld praise where it is due. Last night my husband overheard this poor child singing a hymn which was quite unfamiliar to his ears, but it touched his heart, and in telling it he has touched mine; and if the Good Father pleases, we shall be happy now."

"Oh! ma'am!" said Little Content, "I am so happy—so happy; let me sing my song, or my heart will burst with joy."

"Yes, sing it," said the mayoress, with tears in her eyes, and a bowed head.

"Ay, sing it," said the butcher's wife, with a sigh.

The street was quiet, for all had hurried in-doors at the sight of the mayor's wife, and the little child stood with her hands clasped and her head uplifted, and sang thrillingly, sweetly, touchingly, out of the fulness of her heart, the song that the birds had helped her to sing in the wood.

The first line was hardly got through, when Mr. Baker came to his door. Mrs. Baker speedily appeared behind him, and after her the baker's children, with their mouths wide open. By degrees, braving the fury of Mrs. Mayor, they came nearer and nearer, till they stood quite by Mr. Butcher's door. Then Mr. Grocer appeared, and Mr. Jeweller, and Mr. Tailor, till all the people in the street had collected together.

The song was finished, but the joy was still there in the face of the child, and as they looked at her, they saw such a celestial light in her eyes, that they were awe-struck.

"Is this an angel?" asked one.

"Long ago, in my mother's arms," said another, "I heard such a song; but I forgot it, years ago;" and he sighed deeply.

The women and the little children were crying—that is to say, the tears were running down their faces, and they knew not why.

"This is joy that I have never felt," one said in amazement.

"What is praise?" said a little child.

"Oh, my darling!" said the mother, and she hid her humbled face on the little boy's head.

Mr. Mayor had come quietly down the street, while the hymn was being sung; he had been as moved as the rest, and now he stepped forward and addressed

the Grumbletonians, who all turned towards him, when he began—

"Dear people, we have sinned, and we have suffered; we have known no happiness for many a year, because of the hardness of our hearts. We have lived for ourselves alone, and we have complained of the slightest obstacle in our selfish paths, and the most trifling thwarting of our selfish wishes. We have forgotten who made us, who made the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the pure air that we breathe, and the pure water that we drink. We have forgotten that there is One who is the Master of all, One who has given us hearts to love him as a Father, and to bow down in adoration to him as the Creator of every good thing.

"Let us do so no more, my friends; let us mend, let us all join hands in the good cause, and be true-hearted brothers and sisters, weeping with those that weep, and rejoicing with those that rejoice, so that our little children may grow up good, and true, and loyal, and noble, lifting their faces, cheerful as the early morning, and full of sweet content, to the Great Lord of all, working and praising, praising and working, till they leave this land for the home of the Great One above."

All the people were touched by this speech; the mayor was so moved while he spoke, that his words, simple as they were, sounded like pure and pathetic music to the ears of the people.

Next, Little Content stepped forward. "Dear friends," she said, "the Great Father has been very good to me, he has favoured my work, and heard my prayers, and inclined his ear to my praises." She paused a little here. "Before I go, I will tell you who I am. It was but yesterday that I left my father's palace."

"Palace!" exclaimed the mayor.

"Yes, dear friends," continued Little Content, "my father's palace. I am the daughter of the good King Resolute, whose name is known far and wide. I am Little Content. When I was baptised, good fairies held me. Each gave me some gift. One gave me the power of understanding the songs of birds; another made me know the language of the flowers and trees; and many, many pleasant stories they have told me in the leafy summers; but these were small gifts in comparison with the last great gift of gifts—it was the crowning blessing, without which all the others would have been as nothing.

"And when I came to you the sun shone upon me, and the birds cheered me, and the moon rose when I wanted light, and showed me your town in the distance, and now my short happy work is done, I will go back to my father, and he will rejoice, for he loves you, his dear people, or how could he have sent his only daughter to you? he could not know how well I should fare, he could not tell that it would not be days, and months, and years even, before he saw me; nay, he knew not that he should ever see me

more. Oh, I am so happy!" she continued, "my heart is so light, my bruised feet are healed with the joy of my heart, my torn hands are made whole by your tears, your heartfelt tears that the angels will take to blot out the records of your discontent. Oh! dear people, join with me before I go, and sing my hymn of praise."

Then there rose from the street of the town, such sounds of praise as had never been known before in those parts. The tremulous tones of old men, the deep, strong notes of the middle-aged and the youth, the sweet, clear voices of the women, and the childish treble of the boys and girls. And the warm sun caressed them, and the cool air fanned their cheeks, and the birds came together on the house-tops, and warbled in chorus. Then, in the solemnity and silence of worship, they bowed their heads, and their inarticulate prayers rent the heavens and touched the very ears of God.

Then they went home with the spirit of content in their hearts, with a sweet cheerfulness, and a touching seriousness, and a strange happiness; and the full round moon that silvered the house-tops that night, looked in at many windows, and saw many knees bent, and many hands clasped, and many heads bowed in humility and deep devotion.

Early next morning, Little Content awoke in the mayor's house, and prepared for her departure. Both the cook and the housemaid were her staunch friends now, and the boy in buttons looked upon her with awe. She took a kind leave of them, and when all the world was once more astir, the little maiden went through the town to bid farewell to the rest of the people. She had shaken hands all round, and said good-bye, and was about leaving, when the blacksmith stepped forward, and addressing his fellow-townsmen, said—

"Shall we do nothing for the maiden who has done all for us? Let us make her a litter of boughs, and carry her in our strong arms to our king's palace. We can shut our shops for a day, or our wives can mind them for us—but we must carry the maiden home in triumph."

"Well said! well said!" was the universal chorus, while the maiden stood smiling by.

So they set to work, these strong, willing men, and hewed boughs and bound them together, singing snatches of the hymn of praise the while (for it was deeply engraven in all their hearts), and out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaks, and sings too.

Soon they had made a splendid litter, and Mrs. Mayor gave them cushions, and they put the little maiden on, and she went out of the town in triumph, like a little queen, smiling at all, while the children shouted, and the women waved their hands to her, and the old men invoked blessings on her head.

The journey was not so long for the strong men, and it was such a sweet fresh morning, that all Nature seemed to rejoice over the repentant Grumbletonians.

They did nothing but admire the flowers, and the yellowing corn, and the sky, and the birds, and the sheep, and the mild pretty cows, and sing their hymn of praise, all the way.

King Resolute sat at his window at sundown, thinking of his little daughter, and wondering how she fared amongst his unruly but dear Grumbletonians. He sighed once or twice, for he was only mortal, you know, but he was glad his dear daughter had gone to cure them. And then he fell to singing, in a soft voice,

Praise to the Master of Earth and Heaven.

Suddenly, on the still summer air, the same words were borne to him by many voices. Clear above them all was one that he thought he knew. Could it be? The king rose from his seat and listened intently. Still the song continued; there was no flaw in it. On and on, nearer and nearer came the voices, till the almost stupefied king saw standing at his very gate large brawny men, carrying on a leafy litter a little golden-haired maiden, and she was—Little Content.

The king went to the great gate, and his little daughter sprang to his arms.

"And who are these?" said the king, turning to the men.

"Sire," said they, "we are your Majesty's faithful—"

"Grumbletonians!" interposed his Majesty, with a grim smile.

"Grumbletonians no longer, your Majesty," continued the spokesman, "but faithful, contented subjects of the father of the best and noblest daughter in the world."

"Oh! my daughter!" and the king clasped his child to his heart, and wept for joy.

As for the Grumbletonians, they were entertained right royally, and went back to their town next day bearing letters patent from the king, to change its name from Grumbletonia to Content; and a sweet, peaceful place it has been ever since. It is not much known to travellers, as it is not marked on any globe or map that I have ever seen. Since Little Content was there, so many, many years ago, it has changed, as things, and places, too, have a natural faculty of doing in the course of centuries. and I believe is now an island entirely surrounded by the Sea of Happiness. When we meet there, you and I, dear little friend, we'll shake hands, and then sit down side by side, and sing the little maiden's song.

E. W.